



**United States Department of Justice
United States Attorney's Office
District of Minnesota**

**Frank J. Magill,
Acting United States Attorney**

David Anderson, Public Affairs Specialist
(612) 664-5684; cell: (612) 730-2251

News Release

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Apple Valley woman pleads guilty to filing false FEMA claim

A 35-year-old Apple Valley woman pleaded guilty this week to one count of submitting false claims to the United States in connection with cashing in on Hurricane Katrina.

Shaunena Irene Staple pleaded guilty and was sentenced April 29 in St. Paul before U.S. District Court Judge Paul Magnuson. Staple was sentenced to five years probation and was ordered to pay \$8,225 in restitution for filing a false Federal Emergency Management Agency claim in connection with the 2005 natural disaster.

According to Staple's plea agreement, on Sept. 20, 2005, she applied over the telephone for federal benefits related to Hurricane Katrina. Staple also claimed that she and her five children were living in Mississippi at the time, and were in need of disaster-related assistance, including relocation money. However, Staple had been living in Minnesota since the spring of 2005.

Staple was indicted in November 2007. This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney LeeAnn K. Bell.

In September 2005, the U.S. Department of Justice created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The task force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher – includes the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for United States Attorneys and others.